

SURASĀ, SĪMHIKĀ AND LAṆKĀ IN THE VĀLMĪKI
AND OTHER RĀMĀYAṆAS

After more human episodes of the *Ayodhyā Kāṇḍa* in the *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa*¹ events move towards the forest and the city of Laṅkā where demons with their ferocious actions and supernatural powers play an important role in the structure of the story. Scholars have discussed Rāvaṇa, Mārīca, Śūrpaṇakhā in some detail but other female demons such as Surasā², Sīmhikā³ and Laṅkā⁴ who play relatively minor parts in the *Rāmāyaṇa* have drawn little attention. The object of this paper is to study these three female demons who try to

1. Robert P. Goldman says: «We feel that it is extremely unlikely that the archetype of the VRā. can be much earlier than the beginning of the seventh century B. C. although it is impossible to demonstrate this with any sort of rigor». Cf. the VRā. Introduction and translation by Robert P. Goldman, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1984, Vol. I, Introduction, p. 23.

2. Surasā is called the mother of serpents (*Nāgamātṛ*). All serpents are of divine extraction since one of Kaśyapa's eight wives was Tamrā whose daughter Śukī was mother of Natā and thus grandmother of Vinatā and Vinatā was the mother of Surasā who bore the Nāgas and of Kadru, who bore serpents. For details see E. WASHBURN HOPKINS, *Epic Mythology*, Delhi, Motilal Banarasidass, 1986 (first published in Strassburg in 1915), p. 23.

3. Sīmhikā. Hopkins says: «One sort of Rākṣasas are called Mandehas. These Rākṣasas hang upon rocks and fall into the water at sunrise, dying daily in fighting the sun. As Sīmhikā is a Rākṣasī her son Rāhu who devours the sun and moon (eclipse) should fall into this category». *Ibid.* pp. 44-45.

4. Laṅkā. A guardian deity of Laṅkā and according to the VRā. a symbol of Laṅkā city itself. In different *Rāmāyaṇas* she has been described differently. For details see the discussions in the title «Laṅkā».

obstruct the path of Hanumān in his search for Sītā in Laṅkā. Hanumān overcomes all of them and then enters Laṅkā.

Surasā

Hanumān meets Surasā, the mother of Nāgas in the ocean, immediately after crossing the mountain Maināka⁵. It appears that Surasā has been sent by the gods, ascetics and *Gandharvas* who are immortal sages, to test Hanumān's strength:

«Thereupon the Gods, *Gandharvas* and *Siddhas* with the ascetics called upon Surasā, the Mother of Serpents, who resembled the Sun, saying:

“The effulgent son of the wind is crossing the main, it is for you to delay him for a while. Assuming the form of a terrible *Rākṣasī* as high as a mountain with monstrous jaws and copper eyes, do thou reach up to the sky”⁶. We desire to test his strength and measure his fortitude to see if he is able to overcome you or if he retires discomfited»⁷. Then Surasā assumes the form of a female demon, terrible, deformed and awesome for everyone. She stops Hanumān and says: «O great monkey! Gods have offered you to me and I will eat you up. Come into my mouth; Brahmā has given me this boon»⁸. Surasā then widens her mouth to swallow Hanumān. This episode is found in all

5. Maināka: name of a mountain son of Hima-Vat by Mena or Menaka and said to be the only mountain to have retained his wings when Indra clipped the wings of the other mountains. According to some, this mountain was situated between the southern point of the Indian Peninsula and Laṅkā. A detailed description of Maināka is found at the very beginning of the *Sundara-Kāṇḍa* chapter of the *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa*. He requests Hanumān to rest a while before going to Laṅkā in a human form but Hanumān politely declines as he is in a hurry to fulfil the work of Rāma.

For details see VRā., *Sundara Kāṇḍa*, Hindi trans. by Rāma Nārāyaṇadatta Śāstrī, Gorakhpura, Gītā Press, V.S. 2047 (9th edition), Vol. 2, *Śloka* 91 to 135. The Gītā Press edition is based on Southern recension - see also M. MONIER-WILLIAMS, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford University Press, 1974 (First Ed. 1899).

6. The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmiki, trans. Hari Prasād Shastri, London, 1985 (originally published in 1958), p. 334.

7. *Ibid.* p. 334.

8. VRā., Gorakhpura, p. 856.

the major Rāmāyaṇas but the descriptions vary slightly in each Rāmāyaṇa.

In the Tamil Rāmāyaṇa of Kamba Surasā has been described as a woman with a pure heart. Gods tell her that Hanumān is going to be helpful in dispelling the sorrows of the world. Hence she should test his strength. Afterwards Surasā opens the cavity of her mouth, stretching her head towards the sky. She stops Hanumān and he enters her mouth⁹.

In the Telugu Rāmāyaṇa this episode appears in *Kiṣkindhā Kāṇḍa* where Gonabuddha, the author of this Rāmāyaṇa, briefly describes Surasā as a very hungry woman. Again, like in all other Rāmāyaṇas, the *Gandharvas* persuade Surasā to assume the form of a *Rākṣasī*¹⁰.

In the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* Surasā is briefly described as doing the same thing as is described in the Vālmīki and Tamil Rāmāyaṇas¹¹.

In the Bengali Rāmāyaṇa of Kṛttivāsa descriptions are a bit more detailed when the gods ask Surasā to dispel their fears. They say that the son of the wind is on his way to Laṅkā to bring news of Rāma's beloved. They ask her to obstruct him, test the extent of his strength and intellect and to discover whether he is really capable of fulfilling the task of finding Sītā. Hearing this Surasā takes the form of a dreadful *Rākṣasī* and proceeds to do as she has been told by the gods¹².

9. Kamba Tamil Rāmāyaṇa, Hindi trans. by N.V. Rajgopalana, Patna, 1964, Vol. 2, pp. 12-13. According to V. V. S. Aiyar it was composed in the 9th century. *Kamba-Rāmāyaṇa: A study*, Bombay, 1970, "Introduction". Some other scholars have put the date as the 12th century.

10. GONABUDDHA RAṄGANĀTHA, *Rāmāyaṇa*, Hindi trans. by Kāmākṣī Rāva, Patna, 1961, p. 209. This Telugu Rāmāyaṇa was composed in 1380 A.D.

11. *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* - text and Engl. trans. by Swami Tapasyānanda, Madras, 1985, p. 227. According to Camel Bulcke some scholars have tried to prove that Rāmānanda himself was the author of the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa*. Tulasidāsa in *Rāmācaritamānasa* and Eknātha in the *Bhāvartha Rāmāyaṇa* both seem to be influenced by the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* (14th-15th century) which is probably a text of the Rāmāite sect. For details see "The authorship of the *Adhyātma Rāmāyaṇa*", JGJRI, Allahabad, 1, pp. 215-239, cf. Camel Bulcke, *Rāma Kathā*, Allahabad, 1962, p. 171.

12. *Kṛttivāsa Rāmāyaṇa*, trans. by Shudha Mazumdar, Calcutta, Orient Longman's Private Limited, 1958, p. 169. The date of Bengali Rāmāyaṇa, according to Dinesh Chandra Sen, is 14th century. See Bengali Rāmāyaṇas, Calcutta, 1920, pp. 152-166. Later scholars put it in the 15th century.

Here in the *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān tells Surasā everything about his mission in some detail. He explains how Rāvaṇa has abducted Sītā who was staying with Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa in the Daṇḍakāraṇya. He also explains that the Rakṣasas have become Rāma's enemy because of his benevolent attitude and his services to other people. He also tells her that he is going to find Sītā as the messenger of Rāma and that she should also help Rāma because she lives in his kingdom¹³.

This part of the story is repeated only in the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa*. None of the other *Rāmāyaṇas* such as Kamba's Tamil, Gonabuddha's Telugu, and Tulasīdāsa's *Rāmacaritamānasa* have included this repetition of the past story.

In all the versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān makes a promise to Surasā that he will come back to her after performing the work of his master Rāma and then she can eat him up. Obviously Surasā rejects this.

In the *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān tells Surasā that if she wishes to eat him up she can do so when he returns after having seen Sītā. Hanumān says: «I will come into your mouth and I promise this to you truthfully»¹⁴.

In the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān tells Surasā: «You are a woman suffering from the flames of hunger. When I will return after finishing the work of Rāma who is the Lord of all the gods in heaven I will surrender myself to you». Hanumān smiles as he makes this promise¹⁵.

But Surasā insists that she will eat him up anyway. Then Hanumān, expert in knowledge (*Jñāna*) makes fun of her and says: «I am alone but I will enter your terrible mouth. Eat me if you can»¹⁶.

This statement is not found in other *Rāmāyaṇas*. However the promise of Hanumān to come back to Surasā to be eaten by her is a recurrent theme in all the *Rāmāyaṇas*.

In the Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān says: «Woman do not obstruct

13. VRā. (Gorakhpura), Vol. 2, pp. 856-857.

14. *Ibid.* p. 857, Śloka 154-155.

15. Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa*, op. cit, Vol. 2, p. 12.

16. *Ibid.* p. 12.

my path. After having completed my work I will return to you and fulfil your desire. Now I go. I do not speak a lie»¹⁷.

The *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* describes this as follows: «Thereupon Hanumān said to Surasā: “Oh mother! I am going at Rāma’s command to find out the whereabouts of Sītā. Finding her out I shall return quickly and after conveying to Rāma the news of her welfare I will enter into your mouth. Now give me passage, salutations to you Surasā”»¹⁸.

In the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān repeats the same promise to Surasā: «If you are still determined to devour me I tell you truly I will return to enter your mouth after bringing the news of Sītā to Rāma»¹⁹.

Tulasīdāsa briefly repeats more or less the same thing as do all the other *Rāmāyaṇas*. Hanumān says to Surasā: «Mother, let me go. I will come back and enter your mouth after I have given news of Sītā to my Lord»²⁰.

It is to be remembered here that Hanumān calls Surasā Mother as is also stated in the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* but not in any of the other *Rāmāyaṇas*.

In the *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa* Surasā who can change her form at will says: «I have been given a boon that nobody can cross me and go away». Hanumān then angrily says: «Expand your mouth so that you can bear the burden of my body». Surasā widens the length of her mouth to ten *yojanas*²¹. Hanumān then enlarges himself to ten *yojanas*. Again Surasā extends her mouth to the length of twenty *yojanas*. Hanumān then changes his size to thirty *yojanas*. In this manner

17. Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, p. 209.

18. *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

19. *Kṛtīvāsa-Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

20. Tulasīdāsa, *Rāmacaritamānasa*, ed. Hanumāna Dāsa Poddāra, V. S. 2043, 25th edition, *Sundara Kāṇḍa*, Doha 1-3. Tulasīdāsa composed his *Rāmāyaṇa* in V. S. 1731. It is called *Rāmacaritamānasa* (the Holy Lake of the Acts of Rāma). It has been translated into English by several scholars but the translation by W. D. P. Hill is based on the Gīta Press edition which is the most popular edition in Hindi, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1971 - Second Ed.).

21. Cf VRā., *op. cit.*, Vol. 2, Śloka 159-168. *Yojana* - A particular measure of distance, sometimes regarded as equal to 4 or 5 miles but more correctly 4 *krośas* or about nine miles; according to other calculations 2 1/2 miles and according to some 8 *krośas*, see M. MONIER WILLIAMS, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford, 1964 (First Ed. 1899), p. 858.

Surasā keeps on increasing the size of her mouth and Hanumān keeps on increasing the size of his body. Finally Hanumān reduces his size to be as small as a thumb (*aṅguṣṭha mātrakah*) and enters Surasā's mouth and comes out of her mouth immediately and standing in space says: «O Dakṣayānī Surasā, salutations to you. I have entered your mouth and now I go to seek out Vaidehī. Your boon has been honoured». Seeing Hanumān emerging from her mouth like the moon from the mouth of Rāhu, Surasā assumes her own form and says: «Go O best of monkeys, accomplish your mission. You have done well, o friend. Now restore Sītā to the magnanimous (*mahātmā*) Rāghava»²².

In the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān assumes a small shape and comes out of Surasā's mouth. *Aṅguṣṭha Mātrakah* (size of a thumb) is not mentioned here. After Hanumān comes out of Surasā's mouth he resumes his normal size. Surasā also resumes her usual form and with great motherly affection says: «There is nothing impossible for you now». She praises him and pays him many compliments. Then the *Kinnaras* start singing happily. Goddesses perform dances in many forms. Gods chant the *Vedas*. Malign spirits (*bhūtas*) etc. also praise Hanumān²³. These descriptions are not found in either the *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa* or the other *Rāmāyaṇas*.

The Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* of Gonabuddha describes Hanumān as transforming himself into the form of *aṅguṣṭha* (thumb). The author of this *Rāmāyaṇa* emphasises that Hanumān comes out of Surasā's mouth in the same way that a *Jñānī* gives up the difficult bondage of this world²⁴. Surasā gives her blessings to Hanumān as is seen in all the other *Rāmāyaṇas*. All the descriptions of Surasā's expansion of the cavity of her mouth to the size of several *yojanas* and Hanumān's changing of his body size accordingly to bigger and bigger sizes up to the extent of one hundred *yojanas* is also found here.

In the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* the changing by Hanumān of the size of his body and the expansion of Surasā's mouth has been described in the same way as in all the other *Rāmāyaṇas*.

22. The *Rāmāyaṇa* of Vālmiki translated into English by Hari Prasad Shastri, London, 1985 (first published in 1957), pp. 335-336.

23. Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

24. Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

Hanumān here salutes Surasā and she gives him her blessings as follows: «Go in peace, Hanumān and fare you well. May the bright immortals grant all that is good for you. I was sent to test your prowess and skill and now I know both. Contrive for the reunion of Rāma and Sītā». With this the Snake-mother returns to her own abode²⁵.

In the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān's expansion of his body and Surasā's widening of the cavity of her mouth have been described in almost the same way as in Vālmīki's *Rāmāyaṇa*. At first Surasā expands her mouth to the length of five *yojanas* and then gradually to fifty *yojanas*. Hanumān then reduces himself to the size of a thumb, enters her mouth and then comes out. Surasā blesses Hanumān and informs him that she is there upon the commands of the Gods to test his strength. Surasā calls Hanumān, *budhimatam-var* (wisest among intelligent personages)²⁶.

In the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulasīdāsa, Surasā expands her mouth to first one *yojana* in length, then to sixteen *yojanas* in length and then to one hundred *yojanas* in length. Hanumān changes his shape accordingly and finally assuming a small shape enters Surasā's mouth and then comes out of her mouth. In the end Surasā says to Hanumān: «You can do everything for Rāma. You are the abode of intelligence and strength». She blesses him and goes away. Hanumān then proceeds happily towards Laṅkā²⁷. It is clear here that Tulasīdāsa does not describe Hanumān changing himself to the size of a thumb as does the *Vālmīki*, *Adhyātma*, Telugu or the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇas*. However the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* like Tulasīdāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa* does describe Hanumān transforming himself into a small size.

It is to be remembered here that Surasā is incited by the gods to assume the form of a *Rākṣasī* (female demon). She can change her form at will. As a demon she is capable of eating human flesh. However she is very different from Śurpaṇakhā who appears in *Aranya Kāṇḍa* as a beautiful maiden to attract Rāma. It is her lust that makes her change her form. In the case of Surasā it is the Gods who make her change her form to test Hanumān's strength and prowess.

25. Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, p. 171.

26. *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, p. 228.

27. *Rāmacaritamānasa*, *Sundara-Kāṇḍa*, *Dohā* 2.

Surasā is a Goddess herself according to Vālmīki even though she is the mother of serpents (*nāgamāta*). It appears from Vālmīki that Brahmā has given her a boon to act like this. Tulasīdāsa also refers to the boon. In the end Surasā gives her blessings to Hanumān so that he can achieve his goal. Though basically a goddess she is ready to perform violent acts which most of the Rākṣasas do throughout the *Rāmāyaṇa* with the exceptions of some characters such as Trijaṭā and Vibhīṣaṇa. In the form of a female demon Surasā is deformed, horrific and terrifying. There is a clear contrast here. Hanumān is mightier than Surasā and in spite of being powerful he is also humble and the intelligent messenger and helper of Rāma.

Sirṅhikā

Like the Garuṣa bird Hanumān, in the *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa*, now passes through red, yellow and white clouds. In the meantime the female demon Sirṅhikā sees him. Sirṅhikā, like other demons such as Surasā, Mārīca, Śurpaṇakhā can change her form at will. She says to herself: «A great creature has appeared after a long time. I will eat this creature and my hunger will be satisfied for a long time. Thinking like this she seizes the shadow of Hanumān. This cripples Hanumān's valour. Just like a big ship in the sea is blocked against the wind, Hanumān's heart sinks»²⁸.

After his movement has been blocked Hanumān looks around and later finds a creature on the surface of the sea. This creature is the female demon Sirṅhikā. Sugrīva, the King of the monkeys has already told Hanumān about this female demon who catches her prey through its shadow.

Hanumān immediately realises that it is Sirṅhikā who is attacking him and greatly expands his body. Then Sirṅhikā opens her mouth and touches the sky (*ākāśa*) and the nether regions (*pātāla*) and, roaring like a cloud she jumps towards Hanumān. When Hanumān sees her mouth which is as big as his body he shrinks his body and falls into

28. *Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa* (Gorakhpura), Vol. 2, pp. 858-859.

her mouth and tears the vulnerable part of her body (*marmā*). She is slain and falls into the sea.

Sīṃhikā is said to be Rāhu's mother. When there is an eclipse of the moon (*candra grahaṇa*) Rāhu is supposed to swallow the moon. It is to be noted here that Hanumān has been described here as a full moon swallowed by Rāhu²⁹.

Creatures of the sky praise Hanumān for his terrific action and bless him so that he may be successful in his mission. They say: «O great monkey, he who has the four virtues, courage (*dhṛti*), vision (*dṛṣṭi*), intelligence (*mati*) and ability (*dākṣya*) to never fail in his objectives»³⁰.

A long description of the female demon is found in the Tamil Rāmāyaṇa. She has large eyes and can see for about ten miles. She can be compared with demons such as Madhu and Kaiṭabha³¹. Her teeth look like swords and she has put on the skin of an elephant with a trunk. Her mouth is big. When she raises her head she touches the sky and the ocean starts washing her feet.

In the Tamil Rāmāyaṇa Sīṃhikā is called Aṅgatārā. There is a dialogue between Aṅgatārā and Hanumān. Hanumān says: «It appears that you have the boon of catching people through their shadows. You have stopped my path by stretching the cavity of your mouth into space. Who are you and why are you standing here?». None of this conversation is found in the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa. Aṅgatārā replies: «Give up the thought that I am just a woman. Even immortals' death is certain when they come near me. Not even the God of death Yāma can stop me from eating creatures or beings who come into my sight»³². The Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa does not include all these details.

When the female demon opens her mouth with teeth as sharp as swords Hanumān enters her mouth. All the Gods think that he is dead. The God of Dharma (*dharmadeva*) cries; other gods are perturbed but

29. *Ibid.* p. 859.

30. *Yasyatvetānicatvāri vānarendra yathā tava dhṛtirdṛṣṭirmatirdākṣyam sa karmasu na sīdati*, VRā., *Sundara Kāṇḍa*, Śloka 201, p. 859.

31. Tamil Rāmāyaṇa, p. 14, Madhu and Kaiṭabha, names of the two Asuras killed by Viṣṇu. *Kaiṭabha* was also a name of Durgā, see M. MONIER WILLIAMS, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oxford, 1964 (First Ed. 1899), p. 311.

32. *Ibid.* p. 14.

Hanumān comes out of the demons stomach at once. Aṅgatārā bursts into tears and carries on crying. Like the Garuḍa bird who killed the serpents, Hanumān tears Aṅgatārā's stomach and mouth. The Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* is unique in giving these details.

In the Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* the whole episode relating to Simhikā is very brief. Here Hanumān kills Simhikā by tearing her stomach and then Indra and the other gods shower flowers on Hanumān³³.

The *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* also shortens this episode. The description in this *Rāmāyaṇa* is as follows:

«Hanumān was held up by a fierce demoness called Simhikā who stationed herself amidst the waters and had the power to catch anything by gripping its shadow. When Hanumān of great prowess was caught by her he thought: "Who or what is obstructing my cause and curbing my speed? I do not see anyone before me. It is very puzzling indeed". Pondering this in his mind Hanumān looked down and then saw the mighty and terrific form of Simhikā. Immediately Hanumān swooped down to the surface of the sea in great anger and killed Simhikā with a kick of his feet»³⁴.

The Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* of Kṛttivāsa describes this episode in the following manner:

«Swiftly sped the son of the wind with his face to the south. He had gone some distance when the *Rākṣasī* Simhikā saw him. The wicked demoness thought: "Today I will fill myself fully. Some very large being is going through the skies. I will catch him by his shadow" and she stretched forward and caught his shadow»³⁵.

«"What hinders my speed?" thought Hanumān. "Someone seems to have captured and bound me with a firm rope". He looked around and then saw the *Rākṣasī* beneath him. Her giant form loomed dark and awful and her cavernous mouth yawned up at him. He remembered Sampātī's warning and knew her to be the wicked Simhikā. "I will remove this thorn from my path" he thought and at once became very tiny and entered her gaping jaws. Simhikā was pleased and closed her mouth. It was as if she had swallowed poison. Hanumān entered her

33. Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, p. 210.

34. *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, p. 229.

35. Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa*, *op. cit.*, p. 173.

heart and tore it to pieces with his nails. Boring a hole in her stomach he came out of the lifeless body of the *Rākṣasī* which twirled round and round and fell into the water. The sea animals feasted on her flesh which was a just return for her sins as she had eaten the flesh of so many»³⁶.

Gods then praise Hanumān and bless him. Here in the *Kṛttivāsa-Rāmāyaṇa* it is Sampātī who had told Hanumān about Sīṁhikā. It is clearly mentioned here that Hanumān tears Sīṁhikā's heart and not the internal part of her stomach. That sea animals feast on her flesh is Kṛttivāsa's innovation. Sīṁhikā is being punished for her sins and this is also an addition seen only in the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa*. Both these features are not found in any of the other *Rāmāyaṇas*.

Tulasīdāsa is also very brief here. He says: «In the sea there was a demoness. Using tricks she used to catch birds and other creatures through their shadows. Hanumān saw through her tricks and killed her. He then crossed the ocean»³⁷.

All the descriptions of piercing Sīṁhikā's body and coming out of her stomach that is found in other *Rāmāyaṇas* is not included in the *Rāmacaritamānasa* at all. Even the name Sīṁhikā or Aṅgatārā, as she is called in the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* is not found here. But the killing of a woman by Hanumān as in all the other *Rāmāyaṇas* is mentioned here.

Laṅkā

After crossing the sea for about one hundred *yojanas* Hanumān sees the island of Laṅkā. Hanumān thinks that if Rākṣasas see his large body and sharp movement they will be anxious to know about him. So Hanumān changes the size of his body from the size of a mountain to a small size. According to Vālmiki Laṅkā is filled with demons. After the abduction of Sītā, Rāvaṇa has made special arrangements to protect Laṅkā. In fact Hanumān at one point when he sees Laṅkā has some doubts as to whether Rāma and the monkeys (*vāna-*

36. *Ibid.* p. 173.

37. *Rāmacaritamānasa, Sundara Kāṇḍa, Dohā 2-1, 2, 3.*

ras) will win against the Rākṣasas. «Even should the mighty armed Rāghava succeed in reaching this dread and impregnable city protected by Rāvaṇa what could he do?»³⁸.

Later of course reflecting upon Rāma and Lakṣmaṇa's strength Hanumān composes himself. Anxious to fulfil his mission he reduces his body to the size of a cat (*vṛṣa daṁśaka mātrakaḥ*) so that he will not be seen by anyone as he enters the city of Laṅkā. But, as he enters the city, the guardian and protector of the city, the deity Laṅkā, who is the embodiment of Laṅkā herself sees him.

She appears before Hanumān with her terrible face and having roared loudly she says: «O monkey who are you? What is your purpose in coming here? Before your life ends tell me the secret motive of your arrival here. This city of Rāvaṇa is protected by an army. You cannot enter this city»³⁹.

There is a long dialogue between Hanumān and the demoness Laṅkā who is called Laṅkinī in all the other *Rāmāyaṇas*. Hanumān calls her a cruel woman whose eyes are terrifying. He asks her who she is, why she is standing at the gate of the city and why she is scolding him in anger. Laṅkā using harsh words tells him that she follows Rāvaṇa's commands and is a guardian of the city. She tells him that nobody can enter the city and that his life will end there. She is herself the city of Laṅkā and she protects it on all sides.

Hanumān then restores the size of his body to that of a mountain and hiding his true plans says to Laṅkā: «I am here to see the city, its turrets, moats and gates. I have come here to see the gardens and special palaces». Hearing all this Laṅkā, a female demon who can change her form at will becomes even harsher with Hanumān. She says: «You can never enter the city without overcoming me»⁴⁰.

In contrast Hanumān becomes more humble and tells Laṅkā: «*Bhadre* (noblelady) I will return here after visiting the city». But Laṅkā roars aloud and strikes Hanumān with the palm of her hand. In return Hanumān also roars and hits Laṅkā hard with his closed fist (*muṣṭhi*). Laṅkā falls flat on the ground and her face looks distorted.

38. Cf. VRā., Hari Prasad Shastri, London, 1985, p. 340.

39. Cf. VRā., Gorakhpura, *Sundara Kāṇḍa*, Śloka 32.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 867, Śloka 36.

Defeated by Hanumān she asks for his compassion and tells him about the boon given to her by Brahmā. Brahmā has predicted that she will be overcome by a monkey and then the demons will be under great fear of destruction»⁴¹.

Here Laṅkā forecasts that the evil Rāvaṇa will be killed and the other Rākṣasas will also be destroyed because of Sītā's abduction by Rāvaṇa. She says that the city of Laṅkā is cursed and will be destroyed and that Hanumān should go and search for Sītā.

In the Tamil Rāmāyaṇa there is a description of Rāvaṇa's army standing at the gate of Laṅkā with weapons such as spears, swords, sticks, maces, discs etc. Here Hanumān enters the city directly without changing his form⁴². Obviously this description is very different from the description in the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa. In this Rāmāyaṇa the deity of Laṅkā appears with eight arms and four faces. She is angry, cruel and without any mercy. She is as big as the Meru mountain and is wearing clothes of five colours. She has sandalwood smeared on her body and her eyes are large, which enables her to see the whole of Laṅkā city. All these details are not found in either the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa or in any other Rāmāyaṇa. Here Laṅkā calls Hanumān, *mahātmā* (great soul or sage) following the Vālmīki tradition. Hanumān is as diplomatic here as he is in the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa. He says: «What harm would it do if a poor one like me enters the city».

There is a confrontation between Laṅkinī and Hanumān here which is similar to that in the Vālmīki-Rāmāyaṇa and most other Rāmāyaṇas. The only difference is that Laṅkinī challenges and threatens Hanumān but Hanumān standing firm laughs like Rudra⁴³. Laṅkinī throws a big *triśūla* (trident) onto Hanumān but he breaks it in the same way that the Garuṇa bird kills snakes by breaking them. Laṅkinī, now afraid, starts throwing all her other weapons at Hanumān. Hanumān jumps onto Laṅkinī, snatches away her weapons and throws them into the sky. This battle is Kamba's own creation and is not seen in any of the other Rāmāyaṇas.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 867, Śloka 46, 47.

42. Tamil Rāmāyaṇa, *op. cit.*, p. 24.

43. *Ibid.* p. 26.

Hanumān does not want to kill a woman and says: «If I kill a woman I will incur sin». However he strikes Laṅkinī hard on her neck and she falls to the ground like a mountain. Later she gets up and, recalling Brahmā's words, she informs Hanumān that she is the Deity of Laṅkā and that she is protecting the city as commanded by Brahmā as follows: «I disclose to you the secret that Brahmā has told me. The city of Laṅkā will be destroyed when I will be struck by a monkey».

In this last passage when Kamba recalls Brahmā's boon he simply follows Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* but all the other descriptions are quite unique to his *Rāmāyaṇa*. That Laṅkinī has eight arms and wears an elephant skin is Kamba's own creation. Laṅkinī throwing weapons at Hanumān is also Kamba's originality. Vālmiki does not describe this. In Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* Laṅkā is the symbol of the city of Laṅkā herself; this is not found in the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa*.

In the Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān enters the city of Laṅkā in the form of a cat as is seen in the *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa*. He remembers Rāghava before he meets Laṅkinī who stops him, telling him that she is the guardian of the city of Laṅkā. Following the *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān says briefly: «I have come here to visit the city». The name of the demoness Laṅkā is Laṅkinī here as in many other *Rāmāyaṇas*. Hanumān slaps her and she falls to the ground. She threatens Hanumān in this episode that she will tear him to pieces and drink his blood⁴⁴ which is not found in any of the other *Rāmāyaṇas*.

Following Vālmiki and Kamba, Gonabuddha describes what Brahmā has told Laṅkinī. Laṅkinī says that the destruction of Rāvaṇa and the other demons is now unavoidable.

In the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān enters the city of Laṅkā by making his body very small without making reference to the shape of a cat. Laṅkinī falls to the ground vomiting blood which later Tulasīdāsa also repeats. Since the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* is a text of the Ramaite cult, Laṅkinī mentions Brahmā's words here as follows:

«Nārāyaṇa, the eternal being, will incarnate himself as Rāma, the son of Daśaratha and his *yogamāyā* will embody herself as Sītā in the humble house of Janaka»⁴⁵.

44. Telugu *Rāmāyaṇa*, op. cit., p. 215.

45. Cf. *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa*, p. 230, Śloka 49-50.

Here Laṅkinī also mentions that Brahmā has told her that Rāvaṇa will abduct Sītā, that Laṅkinī will be struck by a monkey with his fist, that Rāvaṇa will meet his end and that the city of Laṅkā will be destroyed.

In the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān makes himself small to fulfil his task. Here Hanumān finds Laṅkinī with a severed head in her left hand and a scimitar in her right hand.

Laṅkinī's fiery eyes blaze like the sun, her red tongue lolls out and her long tangled hair hangs loose on her back. She wears a tiger skin and a garland of skulls. Her skin is like a dark cloud and jewelled rings gleam from her ears like moonbeams⁴⁶.

It is interesting to see here that Kṛttivāsa does not mention any encounter between Hanumān and Laṅkinī. With his hands joined Hanumān says to Laṅkinī: «I have heard of you, O Cāmuṇḍā, you are Śiva's beloved. Why are you here in Laṅkā, mother». Laṅkinī answers: «I am Śiva's wife. At his command I have been this city's sentinel ever since Brahmā built this golden city. When I asked Śiva how long I would have to remain in the abode of Rāvaṇa he replied: "Till the incarnation of Rāma. Rāma will be born in the home of Daśaratha. His virtuous wife Sītā will be stolen by Rāvaṇa and Rāma will send his messenger, Hanumān, a monkey to search for Sītā. When you see Hanumān in Laṅkā, leave the island and return to your own abode»⁴⁷.

Hanumān discloses his identity as the servant of Rāma, courtier of Sugrīva and the son of the wind. He further says: «I have come to Laṅkā in quest of Sītā and have been able to cross the waters because I am Hanumān, Rāma's messenger». Hearing Hanumān's words Cāmuṇḍā laughs happily and departs for Kailāśa.

The name Laṅkinī or Laṅkā has not been mentioned by Kṛttivāsa. The sentinel of the city is the deity Cāmuṇḍā. In other *Rāmāyaṇas* Hanumān fights her and strikes her with his fist. All these episodes have been ignored by the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa*.

This transformation of the tutelary spirit of Laṅkā into a terrible form of goddess was not an innovation of the Vernacular poets for it

46. Cf. Kṛttivāsa-*Rāmāyaṇa*, op. cit., p. 175.

47. W.L. SMITH, *Rāmāyaṇa Traditions in Eastern India*, Stockholm, 1988, p.

appears in a far more elaborate form in the *Brahmānaṇḍa Purāṇa* which was written in Bengal in the 13th century⁴⁸.

W. L. Smith has studied in some detail how the *śakta* influence filtered through Bengali and other eastern versions of the *Rāmāyaṇa*⁴⁹ but it is to be noted that the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* also describes Laṅkā (Laṅkinī) as a goddess with four faces, eight arms and weapons in each arm. Laṅkā attacks Hanumān with a trident (*triśūla*).

Tulasīdāsa is very brief here. Hanumān assumes the form of a *masak* (mosquito) but Laṅkinī detects him. She calls him a thief and says: «All the thieves of Laṅkā are my food. You are going without paying respect to me. You wicked one, you do not know my secret». Then Hanumān, the great monkey, strikes her with his closed fist and, vomiting blood, she falls to the ground. Soon she controls herself and, with joined hands, she tells Hanumān: «When Brahmā gave a boon to Rāvaṇa he told me that there would be a destruction of demons when I met a monkey».

Here Tulasīdāsa is summarising Vālmīki's version of the *Rāmāyaṇa*. A significant difference is seen when Laṅkinī says: «It is my great fortune that I have met Rāma's messenger». Tulasīdāsa finishes this episode with a couplet which demonstrates the greatness of the company of Saints. Laṅkinī says to Hanumān: «My friend if all the joys of heaven and liberation be placed in one pan of scales, they will not outweigh the bliss derived from one moment's fellowship with the good»⁵⁰.

She further adds: «O Hanumān, enter the city of Laṅkā and do all that you have to do, dwelling in heart on the king of the city Kosala (Rāma)». As a devotee of Rāma Hanumān says: «Poison becomes nectar, enemies become friends, a puddle the ocean, fire is made cool and Mount Sumeru a grain of dust for on whom Rāma sheds his glance of grace»⁵¹.

Tulasīdāsa does not spare a moment to introduce his philosophy

48. *Ibid.* pp. 130-136.

49. *Rāmācaritamānasa, Sundara Kāṇḍa*, trans. Hill, p. 341.

50. *Ibid.* p. 341.

51. For a detailed Study see SHYAMMANOHAR PANDEY, "Abduction of Sītā in the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulasīdāsa", in *Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica*, Leuven (Belgium), 1977, Vol. 8.

of *Bhakti* and all the characters, including Laṅkinī, give this preaching in his *Rāmacaritamānasa* in their own way.

Conclusion

Surasā, Sindhikā and Laṅkinī are all female demons who have the power to change their form at will. Surasā does it to test the strength of Hanumān at the commands of the gods, *Gandharvas* and great sages. She is the mother of serpents (*Nāgamāta*). She expands the cavity of her mouth upto the length of one hundred *yojanas* which seems to be *Atiśayokti* (hyperbole). Hanumān reduces his body to the size of a thumb in the *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa*. Kamba and Tulasīdāsa just mention the small size of Hanumān without referring to the size of a thumb. Surasā has a boon given to her from Brahmā to meet Hanumān but none of the *Rāmāyaṇas* describe this boon in detail. Like Sindhikā and Laṅkā, Surasā disguises herself in a terrifying and deformed shape. In the end she assumes her original form and blesses Hanumān so that he can perform the mission of Rāma well.

Sindhikā is killed by Hanumān in a dreadful manner in all the *Rāmāyaṇas*. She has been described by Vālmiki as stretching her mouth from the earth to the sky. Hanumān enters her body through her mouth and tears the inner part of her body (*marma*) using the sharp nails of his hand. The Gods of the sky welcome Hanumān here and he has been described as the Garuṇa bird flying into the sky.

Laṅkinī is the most fascinating character of all three female demons who protects Laṅkā and in the *Vālmiki-Rāmāyaṇa* she proclaims herself to be a symbol of the city of Laṅkā itself. Hanumān is equally capable of changing his form. Here he changes his form to that of a cat while entering Laṅkā. In Tulasīdāsa's *Rāmāyaṇa* and some other *Rāmāyaṇas* he becomes a mosquito (*masaka*) but is still detected by Laṅkinī.

In Vālmiki's *Rāmāyaṇa* Hanumān strikes Laṅkinī with his fist and she falls to the ground. She then recalls the boon of Brahmā, according to which evil Rāvaṇa and the other Rākṣasas will be killed.

In the Tamil *Rāmāyaṇa* Laṅkinī is a Deity having four faces and eight arms. She is equipped with weapons such as a trident, spear, sword, conch, stick, club etc.

In the Bengali *Rāmāyaṇa* Laṅkinī becomes Cāmuṇḍā, Śiva's beloved. In her left hand she holds a severed head and in her right hand a sword. Like Surasā she is endowed with a boon from Brahmā in all the *Rāmāyaṇas*.

In the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* and the *Rāmāyaṇa* of Tulasīdāsa Laṅkinī falls on the ground vomiting blood when Hanumān strikes her with his closed fist. She then recalls the verdict of Brahmā that the Rākṣasas of Laṅkā will be destroyed when she encounters a monkey and Rāma will incarnate himself. Nārāyaṇa has also been referred to in the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa*. Tulasīdāsa follows the *Adhyātma-Rāmāyaṇa* closely and preaches devotion to Rāma (*Rāmabhakti*) profoundly.

In fact this episode is a prelude in which Vālmīki in his *Rāmāyaṇa* wants to convey the course of future events in Laṅkā. All the later *Rāmāyaṇas* follow Vālmīki in their own ways, making new additions, changing the versions and sometimes shortening the episodes.